

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION



South Carolina Seals of Distinction Overview and Guidelines

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Diploma Pathways Legislation

On May 19, 2017, the South Carolina Governor signed legislation allowing for personalized pathways to a South Carolina high school diploma. South Carolina Code Ann., § 59-39-100, was amended to read as follows:

To support the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate, for students entering ninth grade beginning with the 2018-2019 School Year, the twenty-four units required are as prescribed in this section and in regulation by the State Board of Education. (1) Students will continue to be required to earn the units of credit as prescribed in regulation and, when applicable, be offered national industry certifications and credential. (2) Coursework must be aligned with a student's personalized diploma pathway. The State Board of Education shall promulgate regulations that outline the process and procedures for approval of courses to personalize pathways based on students' postsecondary plans and include an annually updated course activity coding manual listing approved courses. The individualized graduation planning process must plan each student's personalized pathway based on his postsecondary plans.

This personalized path to a high school diploma is referred to as Diploma Pathways. There are three key components of this legislation: Diploma Pathway Courses developed by a school district to meet the unique needs of students, Seals of Distinction, and the State Employability Credential.

The amendment above led to the following addition to Regulation No.: R.43-234 Defined Program, Grades 9-12 and Graduation Requirements:

B. Students shall have the opportunity to earn endorsements within each high school diploma pathway; however, earning an endorsement is not a requirement for graduation. Endorsements shall identify a particular area of focus, beginning with the freshman class of 2018–19. The earning of a graduation endorsement shall be based upon the following criteria:

1. Students shall meet all requirements for earning a South Carolina high school diploma as set forth above and within this regulation.
2. Students may earn one or more endorsements in pathways approved in guidelines set by the State Board of Education (SBE). School districts may apply to the SBE to have additional endorsements approved.
3. English I, II, III, IV or their course equivalents (customized English I, II, III, IV as approved by the SBE through the locally designed course process as mentioned in II.H.1) or higher level courses (Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Dual Credit, etc.) must be taken to receive an endorsement.

C. The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) has the authority to develop guidelines approved by the SBE in accordance with provisions of this regulation.

Seals of Distinction Overview

The implementation of this policy is required for all Local Education Agency schools.

The South Carolina Seals of Distinction are a state-level award granted by the South Carolina Department of Education.

The Seals of Distinction do not appear on students' transcripts or diplomas but are instead issued via the Parchment application in the form of a South Carolina Department of Education digital credential. Students must possess a Parchment account to claim their South Carolina Department of Education Seal of Distinction digital credentials.

The Seals of Distinction digital credentials will be available for students to claim after graduation. An email announcing their availability will be sent to the email address stored in the 'Postgraduate Student Email' field in PowerSchool.

Seals of Distinction Qualifying Criteria



DIPLOMA PATHWAYS SEALS OF DISTINCTION TEMPLATE

Students shall meet all requirements for earning a South Carolina high school diploma to be eligible to earn any Seal of Distinction.

One or more Seals may be earned.

Consult District or School Curriculum Guides for more information regarding curriculum choices and requirements.

Honors Seal of Distinction	College Ready Seal of Distinction	Career Ready Seal of Distinction	Arts Specialization Seal of Distinction
UGP GPA 3.5 or higher	UGP GPA 3.0 or higher or ACT 20 or higher or SAT 1020 or higher Tests may be superscored	UGP GPA 3.0 or higher	UGP GPA 3.0 or higher
English - 4 credits 2 at honors or higher level Math - Algebra 1, Algebra 2, Geometry, and a 4th higher level math requiring Algebra 2 as a prerequisite 3 at honors or higher level Lab Science - 3 credits 2 at honors or higher level Social Studies - 3 credits 2 at honors or higher level World Languages - 3 credits of the same language for students entering 9th grade in 2019–2020 and beyond Advanced Coursework - 4 additional credits of honors or higher completed during the Junior/Senior years (the last 2 years prior to graduation)	English - 4 credits Math - Algebra 1 (or the equivalent of Algebra 1), Algebra 2, Geometry, and another higher level math Lab Science - 3 credits Social Studies - 3 credits World Language - 2 credits in the same language Fine Arts - 1 credit	Career and Technical Education (CTE) Completer with an industry recognized credential OR Silver or higher certificate on ACT WorkKeys or Level 3 Credential or higher on WIN SC Career Ready Test OR Completion of Career Ready Work-Based Learning (WBL) placement	4 credits in a single or multiple arts areas, 2 at the honors or higher level* AND Mastery on externally evaluated exam or performance task *If honors credit is not available for arts courses, student must complete four courses in a single art area
		STEM Specialization Seal of Distinction	World Language Specialization Seal of Distinction
		UGP GPA 3.0 or higher	UGP GPA 3.0 or higher
		4 credits beyond required graduation courses in math, science, technology, and engineering; at least 2 at honors or higher level Courses may be in 1 area of STEM or across all 4 areas	4 credits in the same language OR a nationally normed proficiency-based language assessment score of "Intermediate Low" OR AP exam score of 3 or higher OR IB exam score of 4 or higher OR Cambridge AICE Language exam score of E or better before the senior year
	Military Specialization Seal of Distinction		
	UGP GPA 3.0 or higher		
	4 credits in JROTC and an ASVAB score of 31 or higher		

Students must earn credit in all specified courses to qualify for the corresponding Seal of Distinction. Schools are encouraged to expand offerings in honors courses, fine arts courses, etc. to enable students to earn multiple Seals of Distinction. Schools with limited capacity are encouraged to use VirtualSC, additional online platforms, or other creative avenues approved by the South Carolina Department of Education to expand course offerings.

Seal Specific Criteria Clarification

Honors Seal of Distinction		
UGP GPA 3.5 or higher		
AND		
English	4 credits	2 at honors or higher level
Math	Algebra 1, Algebra 2, Geometry, and a 4th higher level math requiring Algebra 2 as a prerequisite	3 at honors or higher level
Lab Science*	3 credits	2 at honors or higher level
Social Studies	3 credits	2 at honors or higher level
World Language	3 credits of the same language for students entering 9th grade in 2019–2020 and beyond	
Advanced Coursework**	4 additional credits of honors or higher level courses completed during the Junior/Senior years (the last 2 years prior to graduation)	

*Lab science courses are designated by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education. Qualifying science courses are biology, chemistry, physics, earth science, and any science for which biology, chemistry, physics and/or earth science is a prerequisite. Courses in general or introductory science for which one of these four units is not a prerequisite will not meet this requirement.

**The 4 credits of Advanced Coursework are in addition to the required 2 English, 3 math, 2 lab science, and 2 social studies courses at honors or higher level. The 4 Advanced Coursework credits can be in any subject area if the courses are weighted at the honors or higher level. The 4 Advanced Coursework credits of honors or higher can be earned by additional honors or higher courses taken in the subject areas listed above.

For example: A student takes English 1 Honors, English 2 Honors, English 3 Honors, and English 4 Honors. English 1 Honors and English 2 Honors qualifies as the 2 required English courses at honors level or higher. English 3 Honors and English 4 Honors can be counted as 2 of the 4 Advanced Coursework credits as they were taken during the two years prior to graduation.

College Ready Seal of Distinction				
UGP GPA 3.0 or higher	or	ACT 20 or higher*	or	SAT 1020 or higher*
AND				
English	4 credits			
Math	Algebra 1 (or the equivalent of Algebra 1**), Algebra 2, Geometry, and a 4th Higher Level Math			
Lab Science***	3 credits			
Social Studies	3 credits			
World Language	2 credits of the same language			
Fine Arts	1 credit			

*SAT and ACT tests may be superscored.

** The combination of Foundations in Algebra and Intermediate Algebra may be used to satisfy the Algebra 1 course requirement in the College Ready Seal of Distinction.

*** Lab sciences courses are designated by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education. Qualifying science courses are biology, chemistry, physics, earth science, and any science for which biology, chemistry, physics and/or earth science is a prerequisite. Courses in general or introductory science for which one of these four units is not a prerequisite will not meet this requirement.

Career Ready Seal of Distinction				
UGP GPA 3.0 or higher				
AND				
Career and Technical Education (CTE) Completer with an industry recognized credential	or	Silver or higher certificate on ACT WorkKeys or Level 3 Credential or higher on WIN SC Career Ready Test	or	Completion of Career Ready Work-Based Learning (WBL) placement

A Career and Technical Education (CTE) Completer has earned all required units in a state recognized CTE program identified by the assigned Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code. State recognized CTE programs with approved course listing for each CIP code can be found in the [Career and Technical Education \(CTE\) Student Reporting Procedures Guides](#).

A complete listing of South Carolina Industry Recognized Credentials (IRC) can be found on the [South Carolina Department of Education website](#).

A Career Ready Work-Based Learning (WBL) Placement must meet all the career ready qualifiers in the South Carolina Accountability System. These qualifiers can be found in the [2024-25 Work-Based Learning Implementation Guidelines](#).

Specialization Seals of Distinction

STEM Specialization
UGP GPA 3.0 or higher
AND
4 credits beyond required courses in math, science, technology, and engineering; at least 2 at honors level or higher; may be in 1 area of STEM or across all 4 areas

Courses that qualify as STEM courses:

- Graduation credit courses in science, math, and computer science as identified in the [SCDE Course Code Database](#).
- Course listed under the Information Technology, Health Science, and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics clusters of CTE courses listed in the [SCDE Course Code Database](#).
- Course listed in the [SCDE Course Code Database](#) with Engineering or Technology in the course name.

World Language Specialization
UGP GPA 3.0 or higher
AND
4 credits in the same language OR a nationally normed proficiency-based language assessment score of "Intermediate Low" or higher OR AP exam score of 3 or higher OR IB exam score of 4 or higher OR Cambridge AICE Language exam score of E or better before the senior year.

The Diploma Pathways Seal of Distinction for World Language Specialization can be earned with accumulated World Language course credits OR with a minimum score on a nationally normed language assessment.

To reach the "Intermediate Low" threshold using a STAMP score, a minimum score of 4 in ALL areas (Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking) is required. A score of less than 4 in ANY of the areas (Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking), does not meet the minimum required score.

The Diploma Pathways Seals of Distinction for World Language differs from the South Carolina Seal of Biliteracy. The [South Carolina Seal of Biliteracy](#) is a proficiency-based award. It is awarded based on the levels of proficiency measured by a nationally normed language

assessment. Students cannot use accumulated credits to qualify for the South Carolina Seal of Biliteracy. For more information on the South Carolina Seal of Biliteracy, visit this [website](#).

Military Specialization
UGP GPA 3.0 or higher
AND
4 credits in JROTC
AND
ASVAB score of 31 or higher

Arts Specialization
UGP GPA 3.0 or higher
AND
4 credits in single or multiple areas of the Arts; 2 or more at honors or higher level*
*If honors credit is not available for visual arts or performing arts courses, students must complete four courses in a single area
AND
Mastery on an external exam or performance task

Mastery on External Exam or Performance Task Expanded Criteria

Beginning with the Graduating Class of 2023

External Written Examinations

- AP Score of 3 or higher; 2-D Art and Design, 3-D Art and Design, Drawing, Art History, Music Theory
- IB External Assessment (EA) Score of 4 or higher; Dance, Music (exception: Group Performance), Theater, Visual Arts, Film

Externally Evaluated Performance Task

Dance

- Selected dancer from an individual adjudicated event sponsored by a state or district entity (i.e., SCDA Festival, SCAHPERD Conference, District Honors Dance Company.)
- Earned superior rating in solo adjudication at state or district sponsored competition or performance setting (i.e., SCDA State Dance Team Championship, Kaleidoscope Performance, Gala Performance.)

Music

- Seated or Alternate member of an auditioned honor ensemble (all-district, all-region, all-state, or national) supported by the school's music program (i.e. All State, Region, etc.)
- Superior Rating on Solo Performance at Solo and Ensemble Event.

Theater

- Individual recognition for performance in a monologue, one act, musical theater, or “Tech Olympics” event through the South Carolina Theater Association or Palmetto Dramatic Association.
- Accumulation of points sufficient for membership in the International Thespian Society.

Visual Art

- Promotion of artwork from regional SCAEA Youth Art Month Exhibits to state SCAEA Youth Art Month Exhibit.
- Individual recognition in externally juried local shows and exhibits.
- Induction into National Art Honor Society.

Externally Evaluated Performance Tasks are based on guidance from: South Carolina Art Education Association, South Carolina Dance Association, South Carolina Music Educators Association, and South Carolina Theatre Association.

Timeline for Meeting Qualifying Criteria for the Seals of Distinction

The Seals of Distinction GPA requirements may be met by either the:

- End of first semester senior year GPA*
- Final GPA

*Seniors who meet the GPA criteria at the end of first semester have satisfied this requirement. These students do not have to requalify with their final GPA.

School districts should designate a cutoff date to report test scores, industry credentials, etc. that may be required to earn a Seal of Distinction.

PowerSchool Coding for Seals of Distinction

Earned Seals of Distinction are coded on the SC Student Information page. Only earned and verified Seals of Distinction should be entered on this page.

To enter a student’s earned Seal(s) of Distinction, navigate to the SC Student Information page:

Start Page > Student Selection > South Carolina State Information > SC Student Information

Scroll to the section titled "Diploma Pathways Seals of Distinction." Click the "New" button to designate all earned Seals of Distinction for the student. (If the student earned more than one Seal of Distinction, click the "New" button again to add additional earned Seal(s) of Distinction.)

Once all earned Seals of Distinction have been added, click the "Submit" button at the bottom of the page. Note that the entry/entries will not be saved until submitted in PowerSchool.

- The deadline to enter earned Seals of Distinction for first semester graduates is January 24, 2025.
- The deadline to enter earned Seals of Distinction for spring graduates is June 15, 2025.
- The deadline to enter earned Seals of Distinction for summer graduates is August 29, 2025.

Seals of Distinction Coding in IGPs

Earning a Seal of Distinction is not a requirement for students, it is an optional endorsement. Therefore, Seals of Distinction are not required to be entered into students' IGP Success Planner. However, by entering students' intended Seals of Distinction in the IGP Success Planner (on step 2), schools will have the ability to create reports to gather data for intended Seals of Distinction.

EEDA Majors **MUST** be entered in the IGP Success Planner by the end of students' sophomore year.

Any EEDA Major and/or Seal of Distinction designated in the IGP Planner is "intended," not "earned." All earned Seals of Distinction must be entered into students' SC Student Information page. (See PowerSchool Coding for Seals of Distinction above.)

Postgraduate Student Email Address

A valid email address, accessible to the student after exiting high school, is necessary for issuance of the student's Seal(s) of Distinction. This email address (one valid email address only, per student) must be entered in the "Postgraduate Student Email" field on the South Carolina Student Information page in PowerSchool:

Start Page > Student Selection > State/Province – SC (South Carolina State Information)
> South Carolina Student Information

Please do not enter school/district email addresses, as students may no longer have access to such email addresses after graduation.

Instructions for claiming earned Seals of Distinction will be emailed to the email address listed in the "Postgraduate Student Email" field a few weeks after graduation.

- The deadline to enter postgraduate student email addresses for first semester graduates is January 24, 2025.
- The deadline to enter postgraduate student email addresses for spring graduates is June 15, 2025.
- The deadline to enter postgraduate student email addresses for summer graduates is August 29, 2025.

Parchment Accounts

The Seals of Distinction are awarded by the South Carolina Department of Education in the form of digital credentials issued via the Parchment application. Student recipients are notified via email that their Seal(s) of Distinction are ready to be claimed in Parchment. Students can then claim, share, and send their digital credential(s) through Parchment's platform.

High schools are not required to have a Parchment account for their students to claim their Seals of Distinction through Parchment. Because the Seals of Distinction are issued on behalf of the South Carolina Department of Education (rather than on behalf of the high school) through Parchment, it's not a requirement for the high school to have a Parchment account.

Graduates must possess a Parchment account to claim their Seal of Distinction digital credential(s.) Once the award is issued, graduates will receive an email from Parchment asking them to claim their Seal(s) of Distinction. This notification email will be sent a few weeks after graduation. If the graduate doesn't have a Parchment account, the email will prompt them to create an account with Parchment.

Students with established Parchment accounts:

The postgraduate student email address entered into PowerSchool MUST match the student's personal email address associated with their Parchment account. If initially linked to a district email address, the student's Parchment account must be updated with their personal email address before losing access to that district email address. This can be accomplished by the student after logging into their Parchment account.

Students without established Parchment accounts:

Students without established Parchment accounts must create an account to claim their Seal(s) of Distinction. This account can be created at any time, including after receipt of the notification email from Parchment.

District Responsibilities

Dissemination of Information

Schools and districts will provide all students and their families information on the South Carolina Seals of Distinction as soon as possible so that students can organize their schedules and plan to meet the requirements necessary to receive this honor.

Schools and districts will provide all students and their families information on creating Parchment accounts that must be used to claim their earned Seal(s) of Distinction digital credential(s.)

Record Keeping

Districts will designate a staff member (or multiple staff members) to serve as a liaison between the district and the Office of Research and Data Analysis (ORDA) at the South Carolina Department of Education. Districts will assign the designated person to the Seals of Distinction Contact role in the [District Entity Management System \(DEIM\)](#).

Schools and districts will develop procedures locally to ensure student Parchment accounts are available to students beyond graduation for accessing their digital Seals of Distinction.

Schools and districts will develop procedures locally to determine who at the school level will enter students' verified Seal(s) of Distinction and Postgraduate Email Address into PowerSchool.

- Deadline to enter earned Seals of Distinction and Postgraduate Student Email addresses for first semester graduates: January 24, 2025.
- Deadline to enter earned Seals of Distinction and Postgraduate Student Email addresses for spring graduates: June 15, 2025.
- Deadline to enter earned Seals of Distinction and Postgraduate Student Email addresses for summer graduates: August 29, 2025.

Recognition and Awarding

Schools and districts are encouraged to make the awarding of South Carolina's Seals of Distinction a prominent component at appropriate ceremonies such as graduation. However, schools and districts may not offer a district level recognition of earned Seals of Distinction until the digital credential has been verified by school personnel.

Schools and districts will inform all graduates and their families their Seal(s) of Distinction will be available a few weeks after graduation. Notification of availability will be sent to the students' postgraduate student email addresses recorded in PowerSchool.